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SUBJECT: UNHCR 2010 PLANS FOR NEW REFUGEE CAMPS AND SUDANESE
REPATRIATION

Summary

1. (U) The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the GOE Administration of Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) intend to open at least two more camps in 2010 for Somali and Eritrean refugees. Melka Dida camp, near Dolo Odo on the Ethiopian/Kenyan/Somali border, is expected to open in February to house the continued influx of Somali asylum seekers. ARRA and UNHCR have also identified an additional site in that area in case of a mass influx of Somalis due to the suspension of food assistance in south-central Somalia. For Eritrean refugees, ARRA is proceeding with the development of a new camp near the existing My-Ayni camp in spite of reservations by donors and UNHCR. ARRA also wants to convert the two existing refugee sites of Asayita and Berhale in Afar region into formal refugee camps in 2010. UNHCR is developing a plan for cash option in lieu of organized convoys for the voluntary repatriation of remaining 20,000 Sudanese in Sherkole and Fugnido camps. End Summary.

NEW SOMALI CAMP

2. (U) Due to the continued influx of Somali asylum seekers, UNHCR and ARRA plan to open an additional camp for Somalis called Melka Dida (also known as Melkididi) in the Dolo Odo area. UNHCR reported that the number of new arrivals in Dolo Odo transit center almost doubled in November to 1,500/month, and Save the Children/USA reported that the current influx is now approximately 3,000/month. Bokolmayo camp, located 85 kilometers from Dolo and opened in April 2009, has now reached its 20,000-person capacity and there are currently over 6,000 refugees in the transit center. UNHCR and ARRA originally intended to open Melka Dida in March or April but are now trying to speed up development of the site so that refugees can start moving there in February.

3. (U) Melka Dida is located between Dolo Odo town and Bokolmayo camp (twenty kilometers from Bokolmayo) and approximately six kilometers from the Genale River. The camp capacity will be 20,000 refugees but could possibly accommodate 30,000 if required. UNHCR has requested the International Rescue Committee (IRC) to manage the water sector and the NGO African Humanitarian Action (AHA) to manage the shelter sector in both Bokolmayo camp and Melka Dida camps (Note: In 2009, Oxfam managed and the Dutch NGO ZOA managed the water and shelter sectors in Bokolmayo respectively but ARRA and UNHCR terminated these agreements due to lack of performance). UNHCR also requested that Save the Children/US expand their grade 1-4 emergency education program to the new camp as well. ARRA usually manages the health sector but is accepting assistance from Doctors without Borders/Spain to handle the nutrition program in

both the camps and transit center due to the lack of GOE health facilities and trained staff in the area. UNHCR Geneva has provided an additional \$4 million to assist in the development of Melka Dida camp as well as improve conditions in Bokolmayo camp.

CONTINGENCY PLANNING FOR MORE SOMALIS

¶4. (SBU) In early January, UNHCR internally developed three estimates for a possible Somalia influx in 2010 due to the suspension of food assistance in south-central Somalia. If arrivals into the Dolo Odo transit center continue at the December 2009 level, then UNHCR expects about 25,000 new Somalis this year. The middle case scenario, which factors a prolonged absence of WFP food aid in south-central Somalia, would be 50,000 arrivals in 2010. The absolute worst case scenario predicts almost 100,000 Somalis entering into Ethiopia. However, UNHCR Deputy Country Representative Cosmas Chanda stated that these numbers are preliminary estimates only and more official numbers will emerge after the regional contingency planning to be held in Nairobi the first week of February. UNHCR and ARRA have already selected a third site for a refugee camp in the Dolo Odo area in case of a mass influx of Somalis. This additional site, tentatively called Ganele camp, is located between Melka Dida and Bokolmayo, around seventy kilometers from Dolo Odo town.

NEW ERITREAN CAMPS

¶5. (SBU) ARRA Deputy Director Ato Ayalew reported that the GOE will go ahead with opening a new camp for Eritreans near the existing My Ayni camp in spite of reservations by donors and UNHCR. ARRA cited

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the uptick in the number of new arrivals (approximately 1,500/month), the current congestion level at the Endabaguna transit center, and that My Ayni camp has exceeded its 10,000-refugee capacity as justifications for the new camp. Although UNHCR confirmed the upward trend in new arrivals, the number of Eritreans in My Ayni does not reflect the true population of the camp as many Eritreans choose to go on secondary movement through Sudan and Egypt to Europe and Israel. UNHCR Deputy Country Representative Cosmas Chanda noted that, while the registered My Ayni population is over 15,400, the number of refugees who showed up for food distributions in October and November did not exceed 6,000. In lieu of a new camp, UNHCR would prefer to continue using My Ayni or place new arrivals into Shimelba camp, which is emptying out due to group resettlement to the United States.

¶6. (U) The new camp, to be called Adi Harush, is located twelve kilometers from My Ayni. Earlier in 2009, ARRA had identified a site eight kilometers from My Ayni called My Tsebri as a possible third camp but ultimately chose Adi Harush instead. Demarcation of the site has already begun, and ARRA plans to finalize the temporary constructions for the reception center and offices by the end of February. ARRA and UNHCR also requested IRC to provide water to the camp as of April but has a truck for water tankering until a permanent water system is in place. The first refugees are expected to be sent to Adi Harush in March.

¶7. (U) ARRA would also like to convert the two existing refugee sites of Asayita and Berhale in Afar region (not camps but locations where mostly nomadic Afar Eritreans can receive food and limited basic services) into formal refugee camps in 2010. As of the beginning of the year, there was a population of 9,612 Afar-Eritrean refugees and 6,450 asylum seekers in the Afar region. These individuals currently live around the Asayita and Berhale sites as well as in various other host communities spread throughout the vast and somewhat challenging Afar region with its difficult terrain, recurrent droughts and all-year-round high temperatures.

¶8. (U) To date, both UNHCR and ARRA have limited presence in the Afar region, and UNHCR covers the Afar caseload out of Shire. However, plans are underway by ARRA to provide water, sanitation, health care, primary and secondary education services to Asayita and Berhale residents. Unlike in other camps in Ethiopia, ARRA will

give the registered refugees in the Afar region the choice of whether to go into the camp or continue to reside in the host community. While both sites are mentioned in the UNHCR 2010-2011 Global Appeal, UNHCR does not expect to increase its presence there but rather continue the current arrangement of periodically sending an officer from Shire to the region for registration and any specific protection concerns.

CASH OPTION FOR SOUTHERN SUDANESE REFUGEES

¶9. (U) UNHCR is developing a plan for a cash option in lieu of organized convoys for the voluntary repatriation of the remaining 20,000 southern Sudanese in Sherkole and Fugnido camps. In November 2009, ARRA reported that the ruling Gambella regional government (comprised of Anuaks) was not in favor of the cash grants, as they feared the refugees (especially Nuers) would take the cash but then use the money to settle in the local community instead of returning to Sudan, thus potentially affecting the sensitive regional ethnic balance. As a compromise to the GOE, UNHCR decided to distribute the \$150.00 per person cash grant on the Sudanese side of the border in exchange for the refugee's food ration card and permission to dismantle their shelter in the camp. UNHCR hopes to start the cash grant program in Sherkole camp (population less than 3,500) in February and then introduce the scheme to Fugnido camp (population between 17,000-20,000). UNHCR would then like to consolidate the remaining refugees into one camp, preferably Sherkole, after the cash option exercise is complete. However, ARRA remains ambivalent about possible consolidation, citing the need to keep the camps open in case the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) fails in southern Sudan.

¶10. (U) UNHCR approached IOM to handle the transportation of refugees from the camps to either the Sudanese towns of Pagak (for Fugnido camp) or Kurmuk (for Sherkole camp). IOM confirmed the availability of 2009 carryover funds to support the voluntary repatriation exercise for both Sherkole and Fugnido camps and any future UNHCR/ARRA-designed relocation plans for the consolidation of the residual caseload.

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Comment

¶11. (SBU) While it is commendable that the GOE continues to be willing to host refugees, the GOE, particularly ARRA, has strong political and financial reasons for doing this. The GOE has long advocated for preferential treatment of Eritrean refugees as a part of its greater foreign policy towards Eritrea. In addition, ARRA is 100% funded by UNHCR and thus views the creation of new refugee camps as job security. UNHCR operates in Ethiopia at the invitation of GOE and ARRA and is very well aware that it is at the mercy of ARRA and cannot easily push back on such issues as the development of Adi-Harush if it wants any ability to effectively program activities in the other camps. UNHCR did receive additional funds from Geneva for the Dolo Odo camps, but it is unclear how UNHCR will pay for all the other new camps without sacrificing services in the existing camps or requesting additional funds from donors. While there is a definite need to financially support the new Somali camps, we should keep pushing back on any appeals for the new Eritrean camps as the actual numbers of refugees in the existing camps do not justify any new camp at this time.

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